

Chapter 2

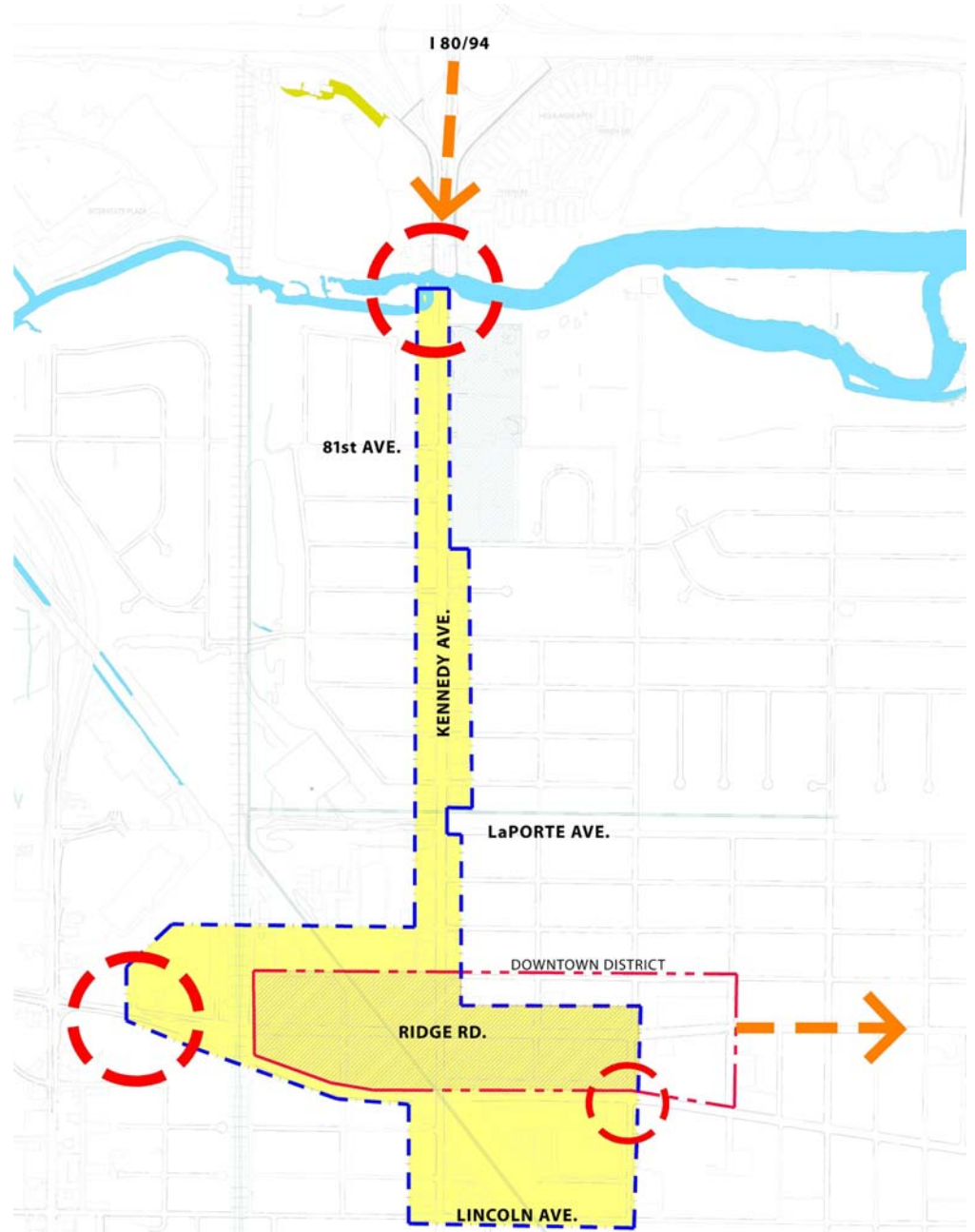


Existing Conditions

Study Area

The Plan addresses the area generally bound by the Little Calumet River on the north, the first set of railroad tracks west of Kennedy Avenue, Lincoln Avenue on the south, and the alley behind Kennedy Avenue on the East. It also covers the Town-owned properties on the north and several other parcels on the west that offer opportunity for redevelopment. This study area therefore is much larger than the existing Redevelopment District. The expansion of the study boundary was primarily dictated by the planning considerations and opportunities offered for redevelopment in adjoining areas.

The study area covers an area approximately 160 acres. The area crosses the center of the town. Several natural and manmade features bind the area. The most important feature of the area is its transportation features. Major transportation routes include the Borman Expressway to the North.~ Kennedy Avenue serves as the North-South arterial road connecting cities of Hammond and East Chicago on the North and Schererville, to the South. The eastern and western boundary of the study area varies, as different opportunities in the northeastern and western part of the town determined these boundaries.



Land Use

The Study area is characterized by a mix of land uses, reflecting its pattern of development as an evolving and ever changing corridor. The land use pattern primarily consists of a commercial strip separated from a residential district via an alley, except in the Downtown area where commercial and office uses are mixed along Highway Avenue, the traditional center of town.

Residential uses in the study area are located both along Kennedy Avenue, mixed with more recent commercial developments, and in the interior neighborhoods. The interior residential uses primarily date to the early 1940's and 1950's, and are typically smaller one story homes. The residential neighborhoods, however, are well kept and homes tend to retain their value. More intense residential uses are located in the southern part of the study area where a new townhome complex exists as a result of an earlier redevelopment effort.

Commercial uses in the study area are mostly located along Kennedy Avenue and in the Downtown section. These include both neighborhood-oriented and commercial uses, including office complexes and retail uses. The downtown uses are a combination of older retail

buildings and newer office developments. As a whole, the downtown area has a fair mix of uses, but many buildings are underutilized with limited hours of operation. This limits activity time in the downtown, as retail buildings close in the evening.

Along Kennedy Avenue, commercial uses are intermittently located among the existing homes that are still used for residential purposes. Many of the office uses in this area are converted single-family homes. Many of these homes have a variety of additions on the front with some being very unsightly. A few of the one story single-family homes that have been converted into small businesses are now two-story storefronts expanded to combine former rear detached garages. Commercial uses along Kennedy Avenue range from a bowling alley, pizza parlor, auto repair shop, hair salon, a mini strip mall, gas station and several other retail stores. Most of the east side of Kennedy Avenue is developed as commercial. On the west side of Kennedy Avenue, the commercial area is mostly concentrated between the River and 81st Street.



Typical Residential



Downtown Retail - Former Highland Department Store



Kennedy Ave. Retail - Homestead Plaza & Plaza Lanes



Typical Industrial

Industrial uses are limited to several sites that are light industrial in character in the study area, with the heaviest concentrations on the western section of the district along the Norfolk & Southern Railroad. On the north side, the Town's Public Works complex has also given the look of industrial to the area, although it is not an industrial use.

Institutional and public uses in the study area cover a larger portion of the study area. Major institutions such as Johnson Elementary School and Community of Christ Church are among the major land users within this category. These facilities are the backbone of the downtown area, and attract a great number of residents to the area. Public uses consist of the recreational land and the Public Works complex on the northern part of the study area.

Recreational and open space uses abound in the study area, and they consist of the very popular Main Square Park at the heart of downtown, two different trails, and two park complexes on the northern part of the district. The riverfront, as a result of the recently completed levee, has become a valuable recreational resource.



Highland Public Works Facility



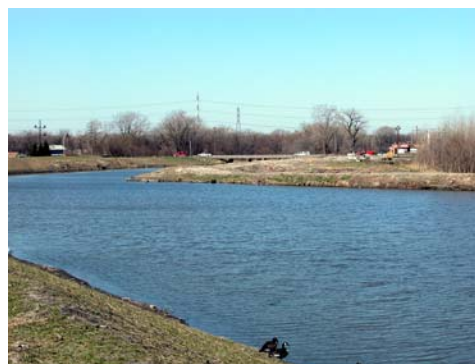
Community of Christ Church



Erie-Lackawanna Trail



Homestead Park



Little Calumet River

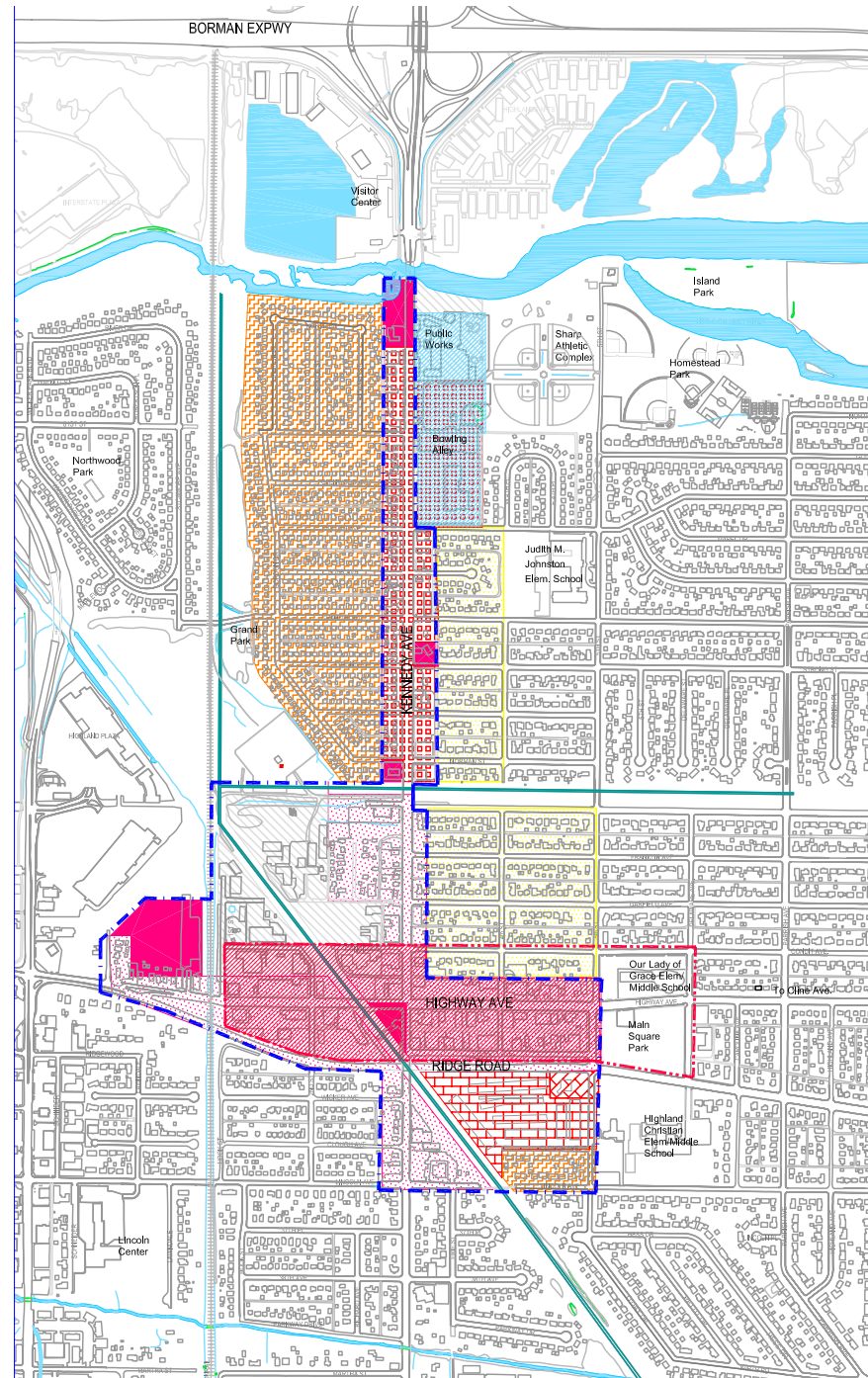


Island park

Zoning

Nearly all of the zoning districts contained in the zoning code can be found in the study area. The predominant classifications for the northern portion of study area, between the Little Calumet River and 81st Street, are Neighborhood Business District and Open Space. Single Family Residential (R1) and one and two Residential (R2) zoning districts generally cover the residential neighborhoods east and west of Kennedy Avenue. Central Business (B-2) zoning covers most of Downtown area, while Light Industrial zoning governs the industrial areas north of Downtown. Kennedy Avenue frontage is primarily zoned as (B1) Neighborhood Business District. This zoning classification will permit a host of commercial uses without major impediments to conversion of the single family homes to commercial uses.

-  REDEVELOPMENT AREA
-  DOWNTOWN AREA
-  R1-SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
-  R2-ONE & TWO FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
-  B1-NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DIST.
-  B2-CENTRAL BUSINESS DIST.
-  B3-GENERAL BUSINESS
-  I1-LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
-  B-PUD-BUSINESS PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT
-  R-PUD-RESIDENTIAL PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT



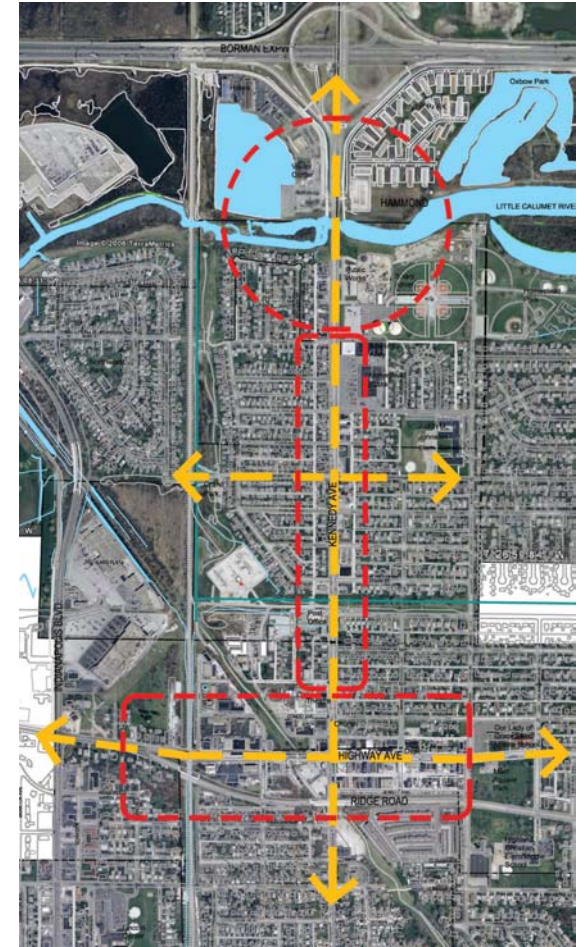
Circulations, Roads, and Streets

The most significant street in the Redevelopment District is Kennedy Avenue. This arterial street crosses the heart of the town and serves as a gateway to the community. The major east-west arterials in town are Ridge Road, and Highway Avenue. Grand Boulevard also serves somewhat a major role in the study area as it connects Kennedy Avenue to Indianapolis Boulevard. A review of the current Comprehensive Plan does not provide classifications for any of the streets. Nonetheless, most existing streets are designed in a grid pattern and provide adequate capacity for local traffic.

Kennedy Avenue has an average daily traffic of #. Kennedy Avenue has on-street parking in several sections, but it lacks other improvements such as sidewalks and other street amenities. As a whole, Kennedy Avenue presents several circulation and traffic concerns. Frequent curb cuts, unrestricted front yard parking, and a large number of unsignalized intersections cause increased volumes of traffic and slower movement. These conditions, in turn, make driving on Kennedy Avenue more dangerous than it needs to be. Heavy traffic on Kennedy Avenue also adds to environmental concerns for the health of adjoining neighborhoods.

Access from Ridge Road to Downtown is not well established from Kennedy Avenue. This adds to the confusion and difficulty in finding the downtown and has resulted in reduced visibility for the Downtown.

Pedestrian circulation has been well designed in the Downtown area. The ease of movement is provided by wide sidewalks, the plaza, and other improvements. These, combined with various pedestrian amenities, provide for a pleasant walking experience. Pedestrian access on Kennedy Avenue from some parking areas is limited at best, as they often create conflict with free pedestrian movements. Better linkage with the trails is also desirable from residential areas and the side streets. Pedestrian movement should be an important element in the redevelopment of the District, as safe and friendly paths encourage activity.



Floodplain

The majority of the northern part of the study area is currently located within the 100-year floodplain. Floodwaters will potentially reach most of the residential areas in the event of major flooding. A levee, however, is under construction on the southern banks of the River. The levee consists of an earthen embankment east of Kennedy Avenue and a breakwall on the west. Once completed, most of the area will be protected from flooding. The Highland Zoning Code does impose restrictions for the areas within the 100-year storm area. These areas are typically considered non-developable. Because of the ongoing flood protection efforts by the Army Corps of Engineers, the flooding is not expected to be an issue for redevelopment in the long term. Therefore, it is not be considered a major impediment to redevelopment.



New levees are under construction along the Little Calumet River.



Undisturbed shoreline of the Little Calumet River



Island Park

Character of the Area and Conditions of Properties

The study area has a diverse array of buildings and uses. The downtown area exhibits the most prominent character as a single use. The character ranges from highway based transitory uses on the north, to old urban character of downtown, and newer modern housing south of downtown. These buildings are primarily one and two story structures which house a variety of office, retail and commercial uses. Newer buildings tend to be of higher density.

The Downtown offers a very unique character with its modern streetscaping and beautification. The Downtown area also contains the oldest neighborhood in town, where several of the original settlement homes still remain standing. The building conditions are generally good, but many suffer from deferred maintenance. There are several vacant buildings, with a few buildings needing to be demolished. In the western part of the downtown there are several industrial uses, some offering opportunities for redevelopment.

The Kennedy Avenue corridor initially was developed as a modest working class residential street. After the opening of the Borman expressway, Kennedy Avenue became a major transportation corridor.

As a consequence, many of these homes were replaced or adapted for commercial and office use. This transformation gave birth to development of a mixed-use commercial and residential strip, without any particular cohesion or pattern. Today, many of the former residential buildings share recent conversion efforts and additions, some of which are very unsightly. Access and parking for commercial uses are often inadequate and sometime even dangerous.

The non-residential structures consist of primarily retail and service uses that support the existing residential community. Conditions range from good to many substandard buildings with marginal uses. This condition is very evident north of 81st Avenue. The uses also spawn an industrial look, while on the other side of the River, in Hammond, the area is more transit oriented and gives a totally different character for the entrance to the community. The industrial look at the entrance to the community is also a severe detractor to the natural look and beauty of the river.



New streetscaping in the downtown area



Strip commercial center on Kennedy Ave.

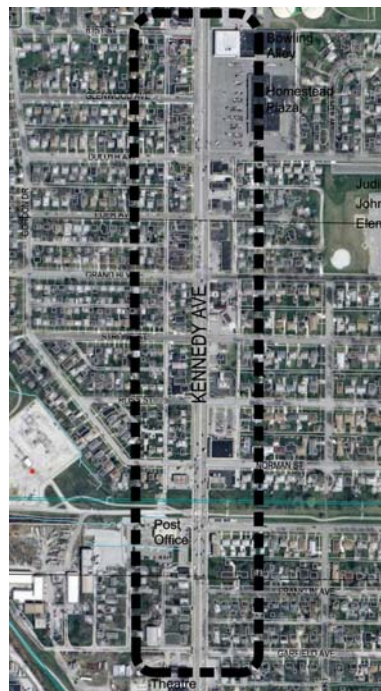


One of the few vacant buildings on Kennedy Ave.

Three Zones

The historical uses of the land, the existing character, and redevelopment opportunities have all given rise to identification of three character zones, or subareas in the district. These areas are defined as having a common or unifying characteristic or history of development. As a part of the whole, each zone contributes both strengths and weaknesses to the character of District. By recognizing and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each zone, we can more accurately identify the most basic of design and planning considerations needed to support each zone. This approach will increase understanding of the study area's assets. It will also assist in setting priorities for future redevelopment efforts, and encourage a unified vision for the whole district.

1. **The Gateway Zone:** This area covers the area north of the 81st Avenue to the Little Calumet River.
2. **The Corridor Zone:** This area covers the frontage on Kennedy Avenue to LaPorte Avenue.
3. **Downtown Zone:** This area covers the traditional downtown area as well as the northern and southern neighborhoods adjacent to downtown.



Corridor



Gateway



Downtown

Key Issues

Based on our review of the conditions, community input, and interviews, the following issues have been identified for each zone within the district.

Gateway

- Little landscaping or beautification associated with street
- Billboards, utility poles, other communication facilities, and other unattractive visual elements
- Lot sizes are not conducive to redevelopment for larger projects
- Linkage with downtown is missing
- Industrial look of the area
- Traffic from the expressway
- Lack of appropriate investment in the area
- Existing public lands in the area take too much of the valuable land for private use



Highland Town Garage - industrial-type use



Entry from Interstate 80/94 is nondescript



Sharp Athletic Complex - large public use in the Gateway subarea



Marginal commercial uses

Corridor

- An incomplete, unimproved, and disconnected pedestrian network
- Unsafe parking conditions
- Numerous curb cuts on Kennedy Avenue
- Retail uses are marginal. Better retail establishments are needed.
- Numerous buildings being used for purposes other than those for which they were originally built (e.g., homes used for office purposes.)
- Lot sizes are not conducive to redevelopment for larger projects.
- Existing housing does not meet today's needs.
- Speed of traffic on Kennedy Avenue is too great.
- Large industrial uses and other large buildings which may be more ideally suited in other areas of the town, such as industrial parks.



Two examples of homes converted into businesses. The home on the right is particularly unattractive, and looks shoddily done. Neither building, however, is large enough to support more intensive development.



Many sidewalks are inhospitable for pedestrian travel, such as this stretch surrounded by high-speed traffic & an asphalt parking lot.



On-street parking is provided along Kennedy Ave., but the space is narrow, with little safe distance from the higher-speed traffic.

Downtown

- Numerous underutilized or vacant buildings
- Lack of appropriate signage
- Existing zoning limits the number of stories and mixed uses
- Lack of upscale eating establishments
- Limited activity hours for Downtown
- Architectural style of downtown is deteriorating
- Lack of available parking



Existing zoning limits the type of new uses.



West entry to downtown. There is no gateway to differentiate downtown from the rest of Highland.



Vacant, underutilized buildings in downtown



A sample of buildings in downtown.

